

Rep. Lungren talks airport security, '10 election

Elk Grove Citizen

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Published: Tuesday, January 19, 2010 5:21 PM PST As the recipient of an artificial hip transplant that triggers every metal detector he steps through, Rep. Dan Lungren (R-Gold River) has a fair amount of experience with airport security. He also sits on the House Committee on Homeland Security.

The congressman who represents Elk Grove recently sat down with the staff of the Citizen to talk about the implications of Nigerian Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab's alleged Christmas day attempt to blow up a plane en route to Detroit. He also addressed this year's congressional election. Listen to the full interview at www.egcitizen.com.

On the possibility of U.S. intervention in Yemen:

Dan Lungren: We have been active, but you've heard some complaints that we haven't been active enough from an intelligence standpoint. So I'd say the first thing that we have to do is get more active with respect to the intelligence operations in that part of the world.

Citizen: On a related note, you sponsored a bill related to federal air marshals' training. Can you tell us a little about what that would do?

Lungren: Well, there are a couple things. Before we ramped up on the federal air marshals after 9/11, part of the regular training program was that they got a course in criminal investigation. Because we had to ramp up so much ... they actually shortened up their training. They took that portion out. Does criminal investigative training give them a higher level of skills? Yes. Does it give them a higher level of skills? Yes. Does it help with morale? We happen to think it would.

Citizen: Can you tell us about your positions on full-body scanners that have been introduced (in some airports)?

Lungren: I've supported that for the last four years. When I was chairman of the subcommittee that dealt with aviation safety, we pushed along the continued development of those. I've been through the one at Reagan National (airport) - I've actually gone through that search. I find it far less offensive, far less intrusive than a body search, which is what I get every time I go through because I have an artificial hip, and it works very well. The problem is we've had those who believe that it's an unwarranted invasion of privacy. So what I came up with ... (was) the idea of an "I don't care line" for those of us who don't care if we go through it. ... The other part of it is money. ... These are not cheap - I think (they're) \$170,000 apiece or something like that. That's the kind of stimulus package we should've had.

Citizen: Does a machine like that - a full body scanner - still have limitations?

Lungren: Oh sure, it has limitations. You (have to) have a reader ... (and) they can miss something off that. That's why we have a layered approach of security. That is only one thing, but it's more effective than anything we have right now....

Citizen: Can you talk about the upcoming election and do you see things differently now that you most likely know whom the Democratic opponent will be?

Lungren: Well I view it on two levels. One is the overall national mood and if I talked to you ... six or eight months ago, I wouldn't have told you (the Republicans) had a realistic chance of taking over the House (majority) again. I think I can tell you there is a chance, and it's not a shot in the dark anymore.

On Democratic candidate Ami Bera:

Lungren: I have an opponent now, as opposed to three Democrats running ... It's interesting that the only two candidates in the Democratic primary that had any experience in being elected to any office were forced out by someone who - at least in the press clippings I've seen - (his) major push has been, "I can raise more money than anybody else." So it's almost become a deal of "I'm judged by how much money I can raise." Well, that may be the deal on the Democratic side, but on my side I just need to raise the amount of money I need to run my race.

Citizen: What makes you say you think the Republicans can take the House again?

Lungren: Well it's not just me, it's people like Charlie Cook, who's one of the best observers of politics, who just came out this last week and said there is a reasonable prospect that this can happen. And he's been very cautious about that. ... You're seeing tremendous blowback around the country on this healthcare bill or the bills that are before (the Congress). I mean overwhelming. ... I have never had more people come up to me on a single issue than I have on this (healthcare) issue. ... I have never seen as consistent a message and as aggressive a message from regular people as I have on this issue. So there's something there.

Citizen: You've recently pushed for the government to reduce the amount of debt it operates under. Is it difficult to have an objective like that and still achieve the kind of national security or military presence the government has abroad?

Lungren: Only if you don't understand priorities. If somehow you think there are not priorities or we have no obligation to establish priorities, yeah, it's impossible to do it. ... So yeah, you can rein in the spending of the government. That does mean you have to be a lot tougher on other things that are non-essential. ... We can't keep going the way that we're going, and yet there seems to be a failure to recognize the obvious and act on it.